

Date sent: Thu, 20 Jan 2000 17:27:47 +0000  
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Subject: ASL: WO '00 AAR

The '88 Mustang doesn't get much use anymore. I made sure tire pressure was OK all around, all fluids were OK, and that there were enough spare fluids and tools behind the seats to do minor road-side work. On passing the Mechanical Reliability roll, she started up and I was off to WO '00, five liters roaring. Drive time: just over an hour.

It was my intent to arrive by mid morning, but I left late and did not get in until early afternoon, Friday, 1/14/00. After checking in and scoping out the room (no fridge---glad the beer I packed was Guinness), I went down to register and get fixed up with my first game.

Jim McCormick, ex-military, now works in Law Enforcement in Montgomery County, MD. He's played ASL since SL days, but has had less time in recent years, owing to family obligations. He used to be a playtester at the old AH offices (not far from his home). He skimmed my Want to Play list (some 85 titles long) and immediately picked out AP16, Danger Forward. We gave the Italians the balance, diced for sides, and I got the Amis. This was somewhat ironic, given the ASLML exchange I had w/ Scott Holst just before WO '00: the only way I could strengthen my claim that the Ities have a shot in this scenario would be to lose.

I put the MMGs/8-1 'death star' in the Level Two Building on the hill on the Ami right (10oCC4.2). This gives some LOSs into the Italian set-up area, and at some of the Stone Locations the Italians are likely to claim, early-on (e.g. 46AA4). All these shots are at Long Range, though, so I planned to move these guys (2x squads) down into the village after the first Turn. As this position is an obvious Sniper target, I also committed a third squad, deployed into HSs, to man the Level two locations at 10oCC5 and 10oDD4, to draw off some of those Sniper attacks.

I set up two platoon-size stacks w/leaders for the run into the village: one stack to CX to 46DD4 and disperse in the APh; another to CX to the 46AA7 Church and adjacent graveyard. I set up a leaderless platoon to CX to 46DD7 (two squads to Level 1; one squad w/BAZ43 to stay on Level Zero). These guys were in position to Advance to 46CC7, where the guys on Level One (especially) can complicate the initial Italian move into the village.

On the Ami left, I set up 2x squads to take Building 46V8 right away (one to CX upstairs, to keep these leaderless troop dispersed, the other, w/ BAZ43, to take the ground level). Both ended their APh in 46V8. I set up a squad and HS to try for Building 46U7, and another such pair to try for Building 46X6.

The strength of this set-up/plan (as Scott mentioned on the ASLML) is that the Amis can get very deep into the village before the Ities can step over their LoD. Further, if Ities are not careful to set-up out of LOS of the 'death star,' they can find themselves busy in their first RPh.

The weakness of this setup is that the Amis are over-extended, in the village (CX and weak), and leaderless on the Ami left [Scott commented, Sunday, that he would never tie up a leader/forces on the board 10 hill like I did; I like that initial long-range fire support/reserve option, but I see his point].

Jim set up one AG and a small, leaderless garrison in the vicinity of the 46S4 building. The other two AGs, and most of the Infantry, were stacked in the 46W3 vicinity for a hard push into the village. The Italian Sniper started right next to the 'death star' (as expected).

His set-up did give me some shots from my 'death star,' but the result was no effect/no rate.

So, after those prep-fires, I made my planned moves, without any trouble. I'm aware of some tricky LOSs from the Italian setup area to hexes 46DD8, FF10, and to some hexsides near that seemingly 'safe' area, but Jim was not, so he had no shooters in position to hit such locations. In any case, I was set to avoid those hazards on the Turn One moves. My only casualties came in the Ami right---a HS, broken on the run for U7. After my APh, I had a squad in U7; squads in V8 (as stated); a CX HS in W7 (or X6?); a squad in X7; 2x squads w/9-1 (all CX) in Z6 and a CX squad in the Graveyard; squads in CC7 (as stated); and CX squads in CC4, EE4 and CC5, w/their CX leader in EE5. I also advanced my 'death star' guys/Sniper guards down to Level One, anticipating a Turn Two move into the village.

In his initial move, Jim went after the broken HS on the Ami right, maneuvering his ACs (successfully) so as to kill it in the RtPh. A successful MG TH from the setting 'death star' had no effect (as expected---MG TK#s are too low to rely upon). My BAZ43 got a shot off from V8, but Xed-out. His initial move into the village was somewhat broken up by a Snap Shot, from 46CC7.1, to the X3/Y3 hexside. By the end of his APh, he had squads (some Concealed) in Buildings W6--Y5, AA4--Y3, AA3--BB1, an AG parked at BB0 or CC1, an AC at 10oW1, an AC at 46Y9, and I forget where the 3rd AG was (it Malfed early, and was later Recalled on a failed Repair attempt). The AG at 46R4, guarding the S4 building, fired, w/out effect, on the Ami squad in Building U7.

As Jim moved his ACs, I reminded him of my oncoming Stuarts; he said he'd written off the ACs already, and was taking the HS kill while he could.

The ACs died soon after. The one at 10oW1 brewed up. The one at Y9 drove into the hex of my Stuart at Y10 (planning to get me from behind at 10oY1). My Acquisition following it into my hex; the zero-range shot hit/killed (no brew-up). The early dispatch of the ACs (without a chase) left me free to use them for Infantry support.

The mid-game was a struggle along the lines drawn in the opening. Several Melees developed---Jim used his local numerical superiorities to good advantage. American strength built over time, though, as CXs wore off and the Americans, dispersed by their Turn One grabs, concentrated. At one point, Jim made a bold move for board 10 from the 46S4 vicinity, but with just one squad; MG fires stopped it. This was a curious case of a blunder gone good (for me): on Turn Two, I =forgot= to move my 'death star' guys to ground level and toward the village (so I advanced them back up to Level Two). Thus, they were in a good place when the Italians tried to run for board 10. The Italian Sniper did indeed strike, but one of the HSs placed for the purpose took the hit, instead of the MG/leader stack.

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Eventually, the Amis got the upper hand in the Melees, but not before a bit of excitement: A combination of 2/12 CC DRs let the Italians get by and Encircle a couple of Ami squads in CC4 (I think). For a Player Turn or so it seemed the Italians might inflict a major setback on the Amis. Ami victories in the other Melees, though, led to mounting pressures that the Italians could not withstand. A Stuart at AA6 was placing telling Canister at Z4/Z3/AA4. The Amis at U7 (and another squad) began to move on Building S4. Ami troops from the Church and X6 vicinities got into the 46BB4--Y3 Buildings. The second Stuart fought through the AGs to get to 46X1. Jim threw in the towel in his Turn Five.

So, that's more detail than I expected I'd recall; some of it is wrong/out of sequence, I'm sure.

It's my guess (not yet validated by actual trial) that the Italians should respond to an Ami 'village grab' setup by committing no more than two companies to grabbing Locations in the AA3 area, and instead push =very= hard, with armor support, to grab the W7 and V8 buildings (especially if there is no 'death star' on the board 10 skyline). The 2 (or so) companies tasked to the AA3 vicinity should get the heavy MMG and ATR, and stay out of Buildings 46Z3 and AA4 until their last APH, while keeping the Amis away with fire. The LMGs, two leaders, and ACs should help out in the push through W7--V9 toward board 10 (with the AGs shelling from a safe distance, and the ACs interdicting Ami moves). Even if half the Italian force (of up to five companies) winds up DM in this maneuver, the ploy might leave the Amis (strong, in the village) too out of position to stop a subsequent move (by up to two companies) toward the board 10 buildings. The Stuarts, with their Canister, can have some real fun vs such a bold Italian move, but they can't stop every one of 15 or so squads (six of which should be the 7-morale guys), especially while also watching out for the Italian armor (besides, C7 Canister won't last forever). Like I said, this has not been tried (to my knowledge), but it looks viable.

After breaking for dinner w/Jim McCormick, I went back to the game room to consider whether or not I was up for a second game that evening. As it was late, I was looking to play something small. I was unable to interest anyone in a go of Strayer's Strays. Damon Norko eventually sold me on the notion that AP8, A Bloody Harvest, was a quick player. Damon, a chess shop owner in the Baltimore area, was eager to play, whatever the hour, as his business normally keeps him too busy for Saturday play (that's his busiest day). So, WO '00 was his chance to blow off one Saturday a year and get in some 'catch up' ASL in.

The record showed the Germans at a disadvantage. Damon warned that the record was polluted by an earlier version of the scenario, wherein the Poles had LMGs (instead of Assault Fire capability); he felt the Germans didn't need the balance. He volunteered to take the Gerries, w/out the balance. I suggested we give the Germans the balance and dice for sides. He agreed, and wound up w/the Germans anyway. So, going into midnight, I went to work on a Polish setup.

I totally failed to grok this scenario, and was taken apart. I could not see how to use the OB-given trenches. Nor did I ever find a way to use the Polish Assault Fire capability. I deployed one of the forward squads and started w/Concealed stacks showing at Y3, X6, W9 and W10 (as near as I can recall). X6 and W10 were full squads; the others, HSs. I put a squad and the 8-0 in Building P1, for long range fire out to Z5. The 8-1/ MMG and a squad went into O7.1 for shots over the Grain. For company, 2x squads went into O8.1. The MMG was Boresighted to W10. Two squads went into the grain at T4 and T8 (or was that S5 and S9?). Trenches went at P6--P8 and at N5. I was very dissatisfied with this defense, but it was past midnight, and I needed to get the game going.

Damon made his main push down the East board edge. Some token forces traveled the West edge. His 9-2/MMG advanced into the FF2 Woods for some long range dueling with my MMG in O7.1. The Polish squad at X6 was killed by an early 'snakes' from the 9-2/MMG. The HS near Y3 was eventually taken down in CC (I think). The guys holding the Woods near W9 forced Damon to make a cautious approach, but the Poles soon had to fall back, leaving the Germans free to assemble behind that area. I got to use my Boresighted hex, but would have done better had I Bore-sighted X8 instead of W10.

As early as Turn Four or so, the Germans were tearing through the grainfield, forming a carpet firegroup in the R6--T9 area. It was evident the Germans would not need the balance (of an extra turn). By Turn Five, the compound was being swarmed. After all my guys were finally fired, I made the mistake of waiting for the Final Fire Phase before shooting again--I'd forgotten that you cannot use FPF in DFPh, only in the MPh. Oh well. German Advancing fires broke all the Poles, effectively winning the game. Rather than play on through the mop-up phase, I conceded; it was now 0500, and I needed some sleep.

I'm still not sure how to stop the Germans in this one. Maybe the Poles can set up in the grain as a carpet firegroup and wait for the Germans to move up? After Polish Final fire, they would fall back in their MPh, and use their AFPh (w/Assault Fire) to hurt the Germans again, before the next German turn? Meanwhile, the MMG, set up or moved to one of the flanks, could lay a Fire Lane through the grain, across the German axis, during the German MPh? The Trenches, perhaps, could go into S10-R9-Q9-P9, w/the MMG starting in the S10 Trench, and the forward force installed in the W9 Woods? The MMG has a range of 11 hexes. Firing from this suppositional Trench line, the MMG can, on an alternate hex grain FL, cut the board in half (S10--X1, for example). Grain has no Hindrance effect for "for Fire Lane placement/ attack purposes" [A9.22], another rule I forgot, in my game w/Damon.

Though it was more fun writing this one up than it was to play it, the point of my WO weekend was to both play and learn as much as I could in two days. Damon was a good teacher-by-example. I understand this kind of terrain a lot better now, I think, even though the knowledge came a too late to help me in the game. Some wit said, 'experience is the knowledge you get just after you need it.' For me, AP8 was a bumper crop of experience.

After my game w/Damon, I did not get 'eyes closed' until 0600 (it takes me a while to wind down from ASL). The alarm clock looked dubious. I set it for 1030 and hoped for the best. In no time at all, it went off just fine. As I slowly pulled myself together to rejoin the festivities, the hotel fire alarm went off. That got my butt down to the lobby several minutes sooner than I otherwise would have moved. 'False alarm,' said the clerk at the front desk. After getting a quick lunch for breakfast, I went back to the gaming area to get fixed up for my third game. I was steered toward Jeff Toreki, a Bounding Fire play-tester up from Texas. Jeff works as a compliance officer for a Texan university and estimates that he has 60...70 games under his belt, many of them from his playtesting for Bounding Fire Productions.

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I couldn't find where I'd filed my Want to Play list the night prior, so we talked scenarios a while before settling on DASL16, Draconian Measures. The record suggested the Russians needed the balance, so we gave it, and diced for sides. I got the Russians and set up a defense. Our table was in the traffic area of the main entrance, so our game drew a large number of casual onlookers. Among the early visitors was Brian Youse. "You're playing Draconian Measures against =Wayne=?!? Good Night! =You= won't be getting any sleep tonight." This prediction seemed preposterous, as it was not yet 1300 when he made the remark. Events would, however, prove him correct. Playing this one was to require a gargantuan effort that would not be over until 0530 or so, Sunday morning.

I set up a forward defense, planning to fall back slowly---if Jeff were to hit me hard and fast, it would be very expensive for him. Jeff played a very careful, chess-like game, taking advantage of the scenario length. All afternoon and into the early morning, a commonly heard (though inaccurate) remark was, "it doesn't look like much has changed." From our point of view, it was a highly charged game, with every third dice throw, it seemed, resulting in some game-shaping event.

The weight of the German attack was into the Factory. Most of the armor, the FT, and the 838 Infantry went that way. Germans assembled in the dL2 vicinity, fought into the dM2-to-dH3 building line, and flanked the Factory by taking the aM1 and N2 buildings. In support of this attack, a smaller German contingent wrestled me out of dG5-to-dB4 building line. Most of my Infantry was set up to fall back into the Factory, where I'd placed the ART piece in the corner at aI3, CA at aH2/I2, on speculation that I might get a crack at a tank, before changing CA to accomplish the primary mission of blowing down Infantry that enter the factory. (The ATG I placed at bC4, CA at bD3/C3 to interdict an attempt to exit the board. This placement was a blunder, because it put the ATG out of play WRT two out of the three possible VCs, and the Germans did not choose the exit VCs. OTOH, it's long absence from the battle forced Jeff to play his tanks w/great caution, he said.)

My troops on my right, in front of the Factory, fell back in relatively good order. On my left, I had trouble, and wound up rather messed up in the aF2/aC3 buildings. At one point it was looking like Jeff would need just one MPH to mop up my troops in that block with little difficulty. A series of unlikely rallies and battle hardenings gave that flank new life, though, and they held together much longer than either of us had expected. Jeff eventually christened my three or so Good Order squads there (and their wounded leader), 'The Platoon From Hell.' One of those suckers Battle Hardened to Fanatic status three times. Unfortunately for me, only the first such hardening had any game effect; no Heroes were generated (but no one went Berserk, either, so I can't complain).

One of the Tigers failed a Mechanical Reliability roll early, and spent the game parked on the bridge at dH1. This tank was trying acquire and shell my HMG in aG2.2. (Those guys were eventually broken by small arms fires and a CH from the dC4 vicinity; they would go on to become part of The Platoon From Hell.) The other Tiger wormed its way along the East board edge, by the Factory. One of the Mk IVs crashed the Factory at aL1, avoiding Bog, and eventually planted a perfect Smoke placement at aJ2, blinding my best Infantry stack there, and masking my ART piece.

My ART piece never got to perform its intended mission. It dropped HIP to take a flank shot at a Mk IV parked in Bypass at dG5/F4. Hit/Dud. That lucky tank survived 2--3 more hits and an ATR shot before getting wrecked at aH0. By this time, my reinforcements had arrived (and none too soon---the balance provision [earlier reinforcements] was a help). I sent the Infantry to building aN4. The tanks I split up, sending one to aL3, another to aI3 (in bypass behind the I3/H2 wall to help KO the Mk IV), and the third to aC4 to help shore up my shaky position on that flank. The ART piece changed CA to cover the Factory interior. It had to first take down the Mk IV in aL1. My 3 or more hits had no effect, though. The Tiger in the East made a bold move into Bypass at aN2/N3. My T34 at aL3 took a chance by standing pat, waiting for an opportunity to Immobilize the Tiger in Prep Fire. The Tiger hit on a BFF shot though, brewing up the T34. Had the T34 gone into Motion, he would might have gone into the Factory entrance at aL2 and lived (the better move, in retrospect). The T34 in Bypass behind the wall at aI3 went into the Factory at I2 (avoiding Bog) to gang up, with the ART piece, on the Mk IV in L1. That T34 fell to a low-dice hit from the Mk IV, though. Meanwhile, Jeff put another Mk IV into Bypass at aI1/H1 to pressure me in aI2. My third T34, dancing with the fourth Mk IV in Bypass at dD5/C5, Bugged in E3. This was a poor move on my part, because the Mk IV was able to slip out of my LOS immediately. Now my last T34 was in a Heap of Trouble from closing Infantry (Jeff deduced that some of my tank's nearby escorts were dummies). I shook the Bog to get to aD1, but got Immobilized by a leader-directed Street Fighting attack. The Mk IV in aI1 cranked around to wreck my last T34 before the T34 could hit the Mk IV w/a flank shot.

With all the Russian armor gone, the Germans pressed home their attack on the Factory. It was by now evident that Jeff had selected the block-clearing VCs (choice 'B'). Two distinct battles were fought in the Factory---one for hex aK3, then the final battle, in that building, at aI3. By the time that fight was over, Jeff had some troops North of the VC block, trying to round up my broken, who were rallying and re- entering the VC area. One of his HTs finally got into LOS of my 57LL, but the Crew survived. The last two MMCs of The Platoon From Hell found themselves in Melee and fully surrounded by Infantry and armor at aD2. German fires into the Melee broke all the Germans in there, but finally broke the last Russian MMC as well, satisfying the VCs.

We'd played some seventeen hours by that time, with only a 40 minute break or so. We marveled at the effort that must have gone into playtesting this scenario.

For the record, Jeff was the slower player (but he also had the more complicated OB). At one point I mentioned how nice it was that he and I play at close to the same speed. He agreed.

Aside from having set up the 57LL too far out of play, I fault myself for not having used the T34s offensively. Rather than shoring my position (which could well have worked), I might have kept the T34s concentrated and gone after the German armor. The VCs allow for a sudden- death Russian win if enough of the German armor is disabled. Had I essentially left my infantry to fend for themselves, and tried this hunt-down strategy, it would have produced an interesting subgame that might have indirectly taken some of the heat off of my Russian Infantry.

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For a glance at Jeff and I in action, see <http://www.advancedsquadleader.com/WO/images/wo00-002.jpg>. That's Jeff in the center foreground; I'm the cute fuzzy one in glasses in the left foreground.

After my marathon game of Draconian Measures w/Jeff Toreki, I was in dire need of rest. Jeff decided to call it an all-nighter; he and some others went out for breakfast. I went back to my room for some minimal sleep before Sunday checkout time (1100).

I woke up still in a fatigue haze. After clearing out of the room and getting a rather substantial breakfast at the hotel eatery, I wandered back to the gaming area to ponder whether or not I had the strength for another game. Matt Deuber, software engineer, fellow DC Conscript Club member, and Youse House Irregular, was looking for a small game. I suggested T16, Strayer's Strays, the smallest/simplest one I know, and Matt agreed. We diced for sides, no balance. I got the Amis.

As Matt was setting up, Jim Stahler arrived, looking for a game. The crowd was considerably thinned down by then. Jim was unable to get a match, so he sat in, at our invitation, to kibitz a bit as Matt and I played. Matt and I are used to discussing strategies/tactics aloud, in playtests, so the addition of Jim's insightful comments was a natural. I was certainly helped, at points, by Jim's presence, but so was Matt, and our game was, on the whole, still ours. Most useful was the post-game critique Jim gave to each of us. I'm very pleased that he gave us the pleasure of his time, knowledge, and company. I see Jim, most Tuesdays, at the playtest he runs, but I do not get to play him much. I learn a lot every time I do. In a mild way, both Matt and I got to play Jim a bit, as we played each other.

Matt's setup was too strong in the East, I thought. The center axis is probably never a good choice in this scenario. In the West, I saw a way to reach mid-board on Turn One, so I set up for that. Matt showed small stacks only at A4 and C4, a larger stack at J1; the nearest help was in building J8. With HSs and the Hero, I ran the 240 yard dash to draw fires from A4 and C4. C4 wisely held fire until DFF, though, smacking a squad (I think). The MMG squad broke in B5 (I think). I ended my Turn One with units in A5-B4-C5--F3, and some broken (and GO) units behind the wall in D5, IIRC (I cannot describe how fatigued I felt during this game, so these details may well be off). It was not a very successful Ami Turn One, but the Germans were in trouble, too; it was looking like a race between how fast the Germans could concentrate, and how fast the Amis could Rally and get over the A5--I2 road.

Matt's Prep Fires broke more Ami squads in the Road. Germans moved through the Orchard to try DMing my broken behind the Wall D5. Ami D1F stopped enough of them to keep him from DMing me with FP, but one unit got to F6 in Good Order, close enough to Advance into F6 and thus accomplish that mission. More Germans assembled behind the H3--I3 hedge, and the stack at J1 grew. The Germans at A4 died to Double Breaks. The squad at C4 routed to E2, got surrounded, and ended up as POWs, soon to be escorted off-board.

The Germans in E6 got whacked in CC by an Ami squad from D5. The Ami MMG squad, a HS, and a leader wound up in the B7 woods where they Rallied. Another Ami squad was able to Rout forward to D3; German fires from H3 forced it to Rout, DM again, to B3. The start of Ami Turn Three found me scattered like spilled rice, with units in E1, E3, C4, B3, B7, E6 and the like. This was not at all what I'd envisioned. Groan.

I took a little break at this point---my mind was mud---and came back to decide how to move so as to be set for a possible win in my (final) Turn Four. My CC victor in E6, I decided, would move to D4 where, if he broke, he'd limit German fires from J1 (SFF Target Selection limits), and thus make it easier for my leader, MMG squad and HS at B7 to get over the Road. If he survived in GO, he could try for Smoke in D4, Late CX to D3. As it happened, Matt's Leader-directed 4(-2) diced snakes, leaving D4 empty. Jim commented that a move to C5 would have been a bit wiser, "but in any case, you can't do much versus snakes."

My HS made it to C5 I think; my MMG squad got Pinned in B5 (or made it to B4); my leader made it from B7 to B3 to help with some Rally work there. I'm fuzzy on these details, but the upshot is that the B7 guys made it to/over the Road to gain a shot at an exit on their Turn Four.

I knew I needed to set up a screen of some kind to prevent Germans from gaining too many fire opportunities into my exit area, but I was unable to put together any kind of Real Good Idea (fatigue, again). I wound up settling on a squad and a half, and the Hero, in D1, D2; exiting some guys early; and Advancing everyone else so as to be able to move guys off all along A1--E1. While devising this 'plan,' I felt very much like I was operating on a two-digit IQ. Jim, in Post-Game comments, pointed out that the 'right' Ami move, at this point, would have been to move guys into G1 (duh).

In his final MPh, Matt stacked two squads and a leader into G1, and three more, with a leader, in H0. I started my Turn Four with 5 EVPs already in the bag. I put the Hero in E1 or F0 to limit German SFF Target Selections, and a AMed a HS to D0 or E1, hoping to draw some limited German fires. No shots. So, I counted five units I could exit, and five German shooters. IIRC, one Ami squad broke in a board-edge hex; one or two German squads Cowered; German Final Fires had no effect.

The Amis got off 13 EVP (12 required to win). Jim pointed out that a single DR, gone differently, in the final Ami MPh, could have stopped a squad, and thus denied an Ami win. Very close game.

I spoke some words of apology to Matt for having given him such a dead-in-my-head game. Jim, rolling his eyes, related how Guy Chaney had once so-apologized after defeating him; "That is =so= insulting, Wayne; here you've beaten Matt, and you're telling him you're =sorry= you didn't =trounce= him?" So, smiling, I apologized for the apology, and re-solved to never do that again.

Thus ended =my= WO '00. I know I got my 'money's worth,' because I was =totally= spent. At 1630 or so, as I was making my final farewells to the few remaining players, Perry Cocke surprised me by presenting me with the Sam Belcher 'Honorary 0-fer' Good Sportsmanship Award because, Perry said, "Every time Curt looked, he saw you playing." My thanks to Sam for making the award (a nice t-shirt), to Curt for selecting me to receive it and, most of all, to Jim McCormick, Damon Norko, Jeff Toreki and Matt Deuber for Great ASL Gaming. I had a smashing good time, and hope all of you did, too.

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